



A TRANSFORMATIONAL VISION FOR NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARIES

2022–2042





Photo: Jeremy Winn/NOAA, under NOAA Fisheries Permit #605-1904

INTRODUCTION

The concept of protecting special ocean and Great Lakes places started gaining attention in the early 1970s, applying a tool used for a century or more on land to the ocean environment. Several timely issues—oil spills, pollution, ocean dumping—created a sense of urgency and sparked the impetus for national marine sanctuaries. Over the following five decades, the issues facing the ocean and Great Lakes have significantly shifted to balancing human uses like commercial fishing, recreation, offshore renewable energy and aquaculture, while factoring in large-scale stressors like climate change. While the need for national marine sanctuaries and other marine protected areas (MPA) as a tool to address challenges has become more urgent, the tool itself is in need of an upgrade in order to be useful going forward. It is time to elevate national marine sanctuaries and their effectiveness (as well as other types of MPAs) as part of a future strategy for ocean and Great Lakes conservation.

OUR VISION FOR THE NEXT 20 YEARS

By 2042,

- National marine sanctuaries and other MPAs thrive in and contribute to regional and broader ecosystem health;
- ONMS is fully resourced to conserve and manage our nation's most prized marine areas;
- Ocean and Great Lakes conservation and national marine sanctuaries are recognized as a national asset on par with other federally-managed places like parks or forests;
- ONMS' workforce is equipped and ready to predict and respond to climate and environmental changes;
- The sanctuary system has the infrastructure needed to meet its mission, including access to cutting edge technology; and
- NOAA is viewed as a global leader for MPA management, science, public education, and peer instruction.



FUNDAMENTAL PRIORITIES FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE

Transformational change is required for the National Marine Sanctuary System to meet the challenges ahead, preserve the places our nation entrusted to us and leave the generations that follow a model for marine conservation.

This transformational change requires us to commit to fundamental priorities to meet emerging challenges:

- Indigenous, cultural, and tribal significance
 - We must embrace Indigenous, cultural, and tribal significance, and invest in meaningful engagement with tribal and Indigenous communities that rely on the ocean and Great Lakes as an integral part of their identity, culture, and well-being.
 - We will embrace the concept of collaborative management with tribal and Indigenous communities and as appropriate, codify those approaches in management plans and agreements.
- Investment in infrastructure for marine conservation
 - Protecting places requires an investment in infrastructure, technology, and tools to equip the people of NOAA to understand, monitor, interpret, and protect the best of our nation's waters. New and greener vessels, buildings, visitor interpretation, and data collection tools will be prioritized. Sanctuaries will be the front line for greener operations at their facilities and on the water.
- Diversity and inclusion
 - The people of NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary System should represent the communities they serve, value all views, interests and beliefs, and be welcoming and accessible to all.
 - We acknowledge that if we want to make progress in protecting the planet, including national marine sanctuaries, we must include more diverse voices and perspectives in our work. We must thoroughly engage and involve in the decision-making process communities of color, Indigenous people, women, people with disabilities, those who identify as LGBTQIA+ and the many others who have been systematically neglected.





Photo: Jenny Hartigan

- Inclusive partnerships across all levels
 - The lift ahead requires working across NOAA, and collaboratively with all federal agencies, state, academic institutions, sovereign tribes and nations, private institutions, and nonprofits, historically underrepresented and under-resourced communities to conserve and protect these treasured places.

We have identified the following cultural and organizational changes that need to be made:

- 1. Conservation & Restoration** – We need to embrace the need for, and invest in, large-scale restoration and conservation inside national marine sanctuaries and other MPAs, focusing on measurable and long-term improvements in habitat and water quality for wildlife and preservation of cultural and heritage assets;
- 2. Representation** – We need to embrace a more diverse and more aggressive biogeographic and community-based approach to expanding the system and therefore its influence on ocean and Great Lakes conservation;
- 3. Relevance** – We need to connect coastal and inland communities to the ocean using national marine sanctuaries and other MPAs as conduits to understanding, caring, relevance, and action, which results in real, measurable behavior change;
- 4. Change** – We need to make a significant investment in the infrastructure to monitor the health of the ocean using national marine sanctuaries and other MPAs as sentinels that provide real-time feedback to stakeholders and managers.

OUR PRIORITIES

Conserve & Restore

The change needed: We need to invest in large-scale restoration and conservation inside national marine sanctuaries and other MPAs, focusing on measurable and long-term improvements in habitat and water quality for wildlife, and preserving cultural and heritage assets. We should focus on key habitats that support wildlife populations, key parameters, and key cultural or heritage assets. We must expand our partnerships across all of government, academia, industry, and nonprofits to enlist all available resources, science, and support to address the challenges at a scale appropriate to realize the outcome needed to leave healthier places under our care.

Link to strategic plan: [Goal 1](#)

Ensure Representation

The change needed: There are ecoregions, cultural areas, and representative habitats currently not being protected under the management of NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary System. NOAA must identify areas that would simultaneously bolster protection in ecosystems that currently lack sanctuaries, create connections between existing protected places, and in turn connect new parts of the country to the value of marine conservation. This can be done through changes to the sanctuary nomination process, but also by supporting communities in targeted areas to develop sanctuary nomination proposals.

Link to strategic plan: [Goal 2](#) and [Goal 6](#)



Photo: Nick Zachar/NOAA



Be Relevant

The change needed: National marine sanctuaries can be made accessible for people to appreciate in new ways and be conduits to understanding, caring, and action-driven steps for conservation. We must invest in bringing the places to the people, while continuing efforts to break down barriers to accessibility. We must make an investment in building physical places, mobile apps, films, and all other available media where people can come and understand why ocean and Great Lakes conservation matters, and the value national marine sanctuaries and other MPAs have specifically. Among other things, we must re-envision education programs; visitor centers; conventional brick and mortar facilities; and mobile visitor centers. We must utilize the latest technologies and test new ways of immersive experience that brings the public beneath the waves and face to face with the spectacular realm of our greatest ocean and Great Lakes places. We can use strategic partnerships with other protected area programs to inspire students and teachers, and create new venues for learning—such as joint visitor centers or sanctuary exhibits in zoos and aquariums—to reach broader audiences and further our impact.

Link to strategic plan: [Goal 3](#)

Effect Change

The change needed: Sanctuaries must be vigilant guardians of the special resources they contain. As sentinels, we have two jobs in guarding these important places—to detect and identify threats and to alert others when help is needed to address those threats. Accordingly, we need to make a significant investment in the infrastructure needed to monitor the health of the ocean in order to provide stakeholders and managers real-time feedback regarding harmful changes that are occurring or anticipated. By providing solid science-based, transparent decisions and describing the intended effects, we will build more trust with stakeholders. To maintain this trust, we must communicate the value of places and the cost of losing them if they are not well managed.

Link to strategic plan: [Goal 4](#)



NATIONAL MARINE
SANCTUARIES

<https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov>